



Artists Desi Mundo & Flo Oy Wong collaborate to create the Oakland Chinatown “Legacy” mural.

Artist Flo Oy Wong shares the story behind the soon-to-be unveiled “Legacy” mural.

When I worked at my family’s Oakland Chinatown restaurant, *Ai Joong Wah*, during the early 1950s, a customer gave me a Brownie camera. Fascinated, I ran around snapping photos of my working class parents, immigrants from China, not knowing that one day the images that I took would grace the side of our restaurant’s building.

Fast forward to 2024 — Muralist Desi Mundo will begin painting some of my Oakland Chinatown pencil drawings in a public art project supported by the Oakland City Council. I want to tell the story of how this community-based project came to be.

A team of mural supporters helped this project to be realized - my brother William Gee Wong, a journalist; community historian Roy Chan, a stalwart preserver of Oakland Chinatown history; Denise Chinn, current owner of the 723 Webster Street building; my husband Edward K. Wong, keeper of our family’s photographic archives; Leianne Lamb and Andi Wong - all who contributed to the mural’s development.



Community historian Roy Chan, Flo, Nellie, Bill and Ed Wong at Imperial Soup. Photo: Andi Wong

One day in early 2021, my brother, Bill, invited my poet sister Nellie Wong and me to an interview with Roy Chan, community historian of Oakland Chinatown for the Oakland Chinatown Oral History Project. Bill was involved early on in the creation of this important project. We met Roy at the Oakland Asian Community Center (OACC) to share our childhood family history.

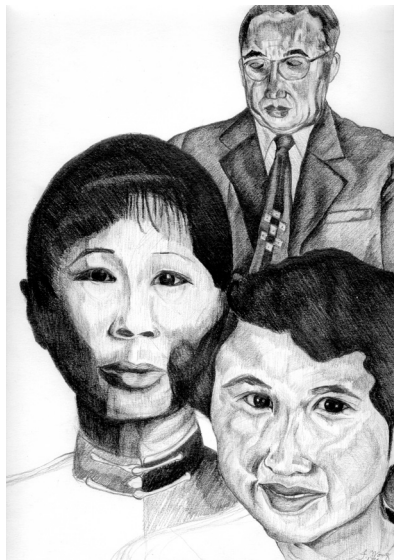
I brought along a copy of my 2018 art and poetry book, “Dreaming of Glistening Pomeles,” to show Roy. “Here’s my book about Chinatown,” I said. “I did the drawings and wrote the poems.”

Roy flipped through my book, fascinated by what I had created as a tribute to our family’s 1940s to 1960s restaurant-based history. Unknown to me, after our heartwarming energy, he showed my drawings and poems to the muralist, Desi Mundo. Unknown to me, Desi had already sketched his Oakland Chinatown Legacy drawings. A short time later, Roy and Desi, invited me to collaborate on the 723 Webster Legacy Mural.



Muralist Desi Mundo on the scaffolding. Photo: Young Wong

In a moment of surprise and disbelief, I agreed, saying that I did not want to go onto a scaffold. They laughed, saying that I could stay on the ground.



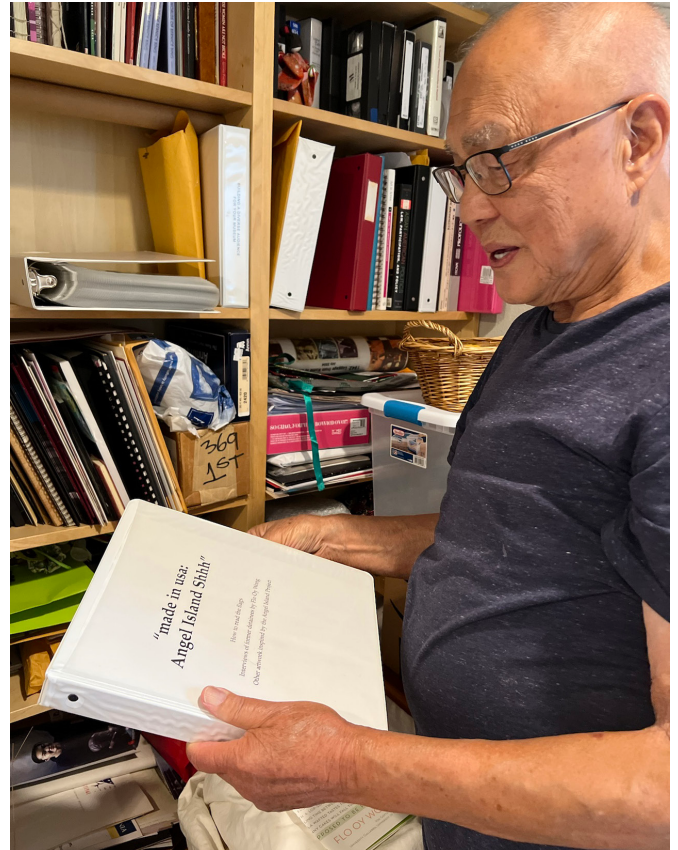
Flo Oy Wong Oakland Chinatown Series (1983-1991) is a body of 35 autobiographical narrative graphite drawing of Flo Oy Wong's family in Oakland Chinatown from the 1940s to the 1960s.



Denise Chinn, the owner of 723 Webster Street - home to The Great China and Imperial Soup.

Desi, Roy, and I started Zoom planning sessions. Enter Denise Chinn, the current owner of the property. She told us about her high school daughter who wanted to have a mural painted on the site of 723 Webster Street. That mural did not materialize. Denise's contribution to the 723 Legacy mural project moved us forward.

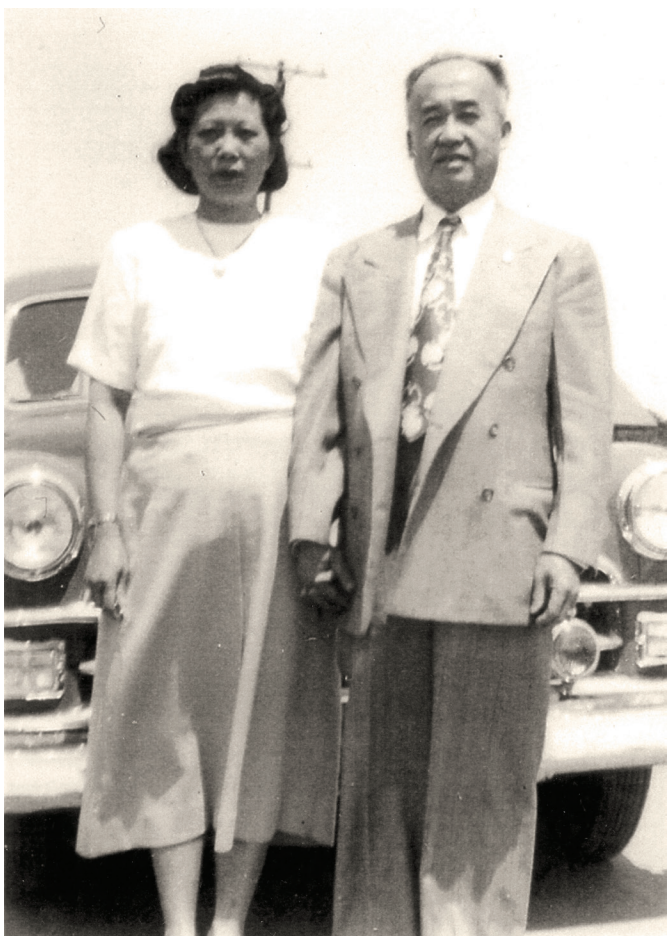
After several Zoom meetings with our core group, Desi Mundo, Roy Chan, and I presented our proposal to the Oakland City Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas's office. Councilwoman Bas, who represented Chinatown, was wholeheartedly receptive to our efforts to add to the public art aesthetics of Oakland Chinatown. She joined our mural intention, as did other funders, including the Zellerbach Family Fund and the Senior Assistance Foundation East Bay.



(left) Chris Wong filming on the rooftop of 723 Webster Street. (right) Ed Wong in the library.

Another contribution came from the San Jose-based Contemporary Asian Theater Scene (CATS) chaired by president Leianne Lamb. CATS commissioned artist/filmmaker Andi Wong, to produce a short film, *Drawn From Life: The Creative Legacy of Flo Oy Wong*, telling the story of my Oakland Chinatown visual memories presented in my book. Andi met with Desi, Roy, and me to begin filming with her son, Chris. They needed to have Andi's film ready to show at the CATS Silicon Valley Asian Pacific FilmFest 2023.

In the meantime, my husband, Ed, checked his family photo archives for images to send to Desi, Roy, and Andi.



(left) *Mama & Baba*; (right) Nellie Wong, Bill Wong and Flo Oy Wong. Photo: Andria Lo

Throughout our planning time, I became highly aware that the mural's reality in 2024 is a team effort that honors my courageous working class parents whose American life is now included in my brother William Gee Wong's recently published book, *Sons of Chinatown*, and in the poetry of my sister poet Nellie Wong and me, Flo Oy Wong who became an artist at the age of forty and a poet at the age of seventy five.

At the cusp of my eighty-sixth birthday in 2024, I understand the strength of community cohesion. Together, we understand what it means to honor our under-the-radar immigrant ancestors who provided the opportunities for us, their offspring, to step up to the plate of claiming who we are, Americans-of-color.

FLO OY WONG

September 21, 2024